

EPISODE 112

[0:00:03.1] EW: It's a shame, but it's true. We've learned from those mistakes or rather successful creative people have learned from their mistakes, there's no guarantee that a failure leads to success but it's always, always part of the equation.

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:25.5] AT: Welcome to the Portfolio Life Podcast with Jeff Goins. I'm your host Andy Traub. Jeff believes that every creative should live a portfolio life. A life full of pursuing work that matters, making a difference with your art and discovering your true voice. Jeff is committed to helping you find, develop, and live out your unique world for you so that you too can live a portfolio life.

You know genius is a fascinating area of discussion for many reasons. But is there a chance that we've missed out on an important part of the genius equation? What about their physical location? How much does the environment around these people we now consider geniuses matter and is there hope for you if you don't live in a creative mecca? In this conversation with Eric Weiner, author of *The Geography of Genius*, you'll find out.

Here is his conversation with Jeff.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:01:26.2] JG: So Eric, as a writer, do you know that feeling when you have this great idea for a book and you just think like, "The world needs this book," and you're getting ready to write it or like write the proposal and pitch it to a publisher and then all of a sudden that book comes out. Do you know that feeling?

[0:01:44.8] EW: Yeah, I've had that feeling.

[0:01:44.9] JG: Like somebody already wrote the book.

[0:01:47.2] EW: Right, that does happen. I should have got past that though because basically I realize that everything has been done. There was a historian named Will Durant, famous historian of the 20th century who once said that, “Nothing is new but the arranging.” So that’s what I believe now is that someone else may have done it but they haven’t arranged the pieces exactly the way I do. So that used to bother me a lot more than it does now. Now I’m like, “Okay, well they did their version of it now and I’m going to do my version.”

[0:02:17.4] JG: So your book, *The Geography of Genius*, was that for me. I had been reading all of this biographies of very creative famous people like Earnest Hemingway or Vincent Van Gogh and I had started to notice that this idea of the “lone genius”, which has been debunked before and you addressed this in your book.

It’s a myth or at least not the whole story and I had this great idea that wouldn’t it be interesting if you examined the different places that have created some of history’s most remarkable people, artists, inventors et cetera, these people that we tend to label geniuses? I’m like, “Okay, this is great and I’m getting ready to write it,” and no joke, like the next week, your book came out and I was like, “Oh, okay. Well I’m going to...”

[0:03:07.3] EW: Sorry about that.

[0:03:08.9] JG: I wish you would have talked to me about it first.

[0:03:10.2] EW: At least you weren’t three quarters of the way through the book when the book came out. That would be worse.

[0:03:15.7] JG: Yeah. No, I love what you said about rearranging, you’re absolutely right and I’ve been reading a lot about creativity because it’s affecting this next thing that I’m working on. But I love your book because, honestly it wasn’t what I was expecting, it was I think Walter Isaacson called it like a — I don’t have the quote in front of me, but it was like, “history and wisdom wrapped up under the guise of like a rollicking adventure”. A rollicking adventure, that’s kind of what it felt like. It’s almost like a travel log and I love that.

[0:03:43.9] EW: Well it is. It's a hybrid of part travel log, part history, part social science and that's what I try to do is arranging the pieces in a different way.

[0:03:52.8] JG: So where did you first get this idea? Because I love this idea and as a writer, I'm always curious how other authors stumble upon their ideas and then how they test their ideas and turn them into a book. What I loved about *The Geography of Genius* is you weren't trying to be the expert. You were saying, "Hey, I kind of have this idea," and you go to Greece and you tell your guide through that part of your trip when you're sort of studying the culture of ancient Athens. Like, "Yeah, I don't know that you're right about this." So you have this hypothesis that you're not quite sure as true and you're testing it through this little adventures but where did you first get that idea?

[0:04:33.3] EW: Well first of all I am a place first person. There are dog people and cat people, and people people, I'm a place person. I see the world through the prism and place, always have. One of my previous books, *The Geography of Bliss*, I looked at the connection between place and happiness, then I wrote about the connection between place and our spiritual lives and what's a sort of other big piece of our lives besides happiness, spiritual contentment? It's probably creativity.

That is, in this day and age at least for many people, not really seeing this as something that is optional but something that is really a necessary ingredient in a complete and meaningful life. It struck me that we really focus almost exclusively on the creative genius, whether it's Einstein or Steve Jobs, and we ignore the environment in which their "geniusing" takes place. We almost treat them like shooting stars in the sky, just this miraculous thing that you have no idea where it came from or when there will be another one.

I just instinctively knew that that was wrong, and I looked around the world and noticed that over time, geniuses don't appear randomly. One in Chicago, Bolivia, Siberia. They appear at certain places at certain times in these clusters, these genius clusters and clearly something was going on back then, and it seemed like a book that needed to be written.

[0:06:05.3] JG: Yeah. So how did you go from that point to writing the book? Because the book is a travel log, it's you going to this different places and then as Walter Isaacson's endorsement

mentioned, there's lots of great history behind the place and lots of deeper research that you do. But the book is told as you sort of going on this adventures. How long did that take and how did that unfold?

[0:06:31.8] EW: My short answer is too long, that's what my wife will say at least. Because all the stages grow and grow. I keep saying I'm going to write a small book, like the history of asparagus or something. You can really wrap your arms around that. But I keep being drawn to this big, hug unwieldy topics, like creative genius.

So basically my process works like this: I have several things going on simultaneously. One thing that's going on is I'm researching creativity in general, researching where the idea of this concept comes from and really delving into a lot of social science research in of which there are hundreds, easily thousands of papers written about not only what makes a person creative but what makes a place creative.

So I read those pretty dense kind of dry academic papers, looking for those nuggets of gold and then once I had my seven places selected, I dove into the history of these places, read everything I can get my hands on about their golden ages. Then I got on an airplane, not exactly in this order, but at some point I get on an airplane and fly to these places. Now I realize I could have written the entire book without leaving my home but as a place person, I needed to go there and I think, why does anyone travel to Florence, Italy or to Athens or anywhere these days in the age of Google Earth and everything, when we can see it all online?

But there is something still today about commuting with the past by going to the actual place where these golden ages blossomed and walking in the footsteps of Socrates or Leonardo. Touching the stone that they touched and it also, I think, makes for a better read to actually take the reader along on exactly as you say, an adventure.

[0:08:22.9] JG: Absolutely and having been to Florence, Italy multiple times, I loved revisiting it through your lens and I think you would say, not to put words in your mouth, but following along as a reader, it seemed to me that you discovered things by going to these places that you wouldn't have otherwise learned if you just looked at the history and looked at Google Earth and just wrote your book.

[0:08:44.9] EW: Absolutely, and I think the key in writing a book like this is maintaining their balance between knowledge and ignorance. What I mean by that is — yeah, I wanted to know about Florence before I landed there. I didn't want to arrive completely ignorant but I didn't want to have everything "figured out".

I wanted to arrive with unanswered questions and with an open mind to possibility that what I had read had been wrong. By finding the right people there and finding the right port holes to the past, I think I was able to actually discover something on the ground and it's not easy because, just to continue with the example of Florence, you've been there and it's a familiar destination.

The products of the golden age are all on display at Uffizi Museum and other museums. The great Michael Angelo's *David* and all this magnificent art work. But the process remains largely hidden, how that these genius works of art came to be. It takes a lot more work, let's put it that way, to excavate that. That was the challenge.

[0:09:53.8] JG: Yeah I loved that insight from the book. You said something like, "Archeologist love mistakes because it shows process." Am I remembering that quote right?

[0:10:03.5] EW: Exactly.

[0:10:05.2] JG: One of the things that you, I remember this in the Florence chapter, this is one of my favorite chapters, you said that like we don't see the process usually. You kind of have to dig deep, you had this fun little idea that we should create a museum of crap to show the process. Can you unpack that a little bit more? Why do we need a museum of crap?

[0:10:25.5] EW: Yeah, to show them mistakes, right. I think in the museum of crap, you would have all these bad art that didn't work out. Perhaps even by the masters themselves because they produced plenty of crap. I don't know if you're old enough to remember New Coke that had just — yeah, and maybe a Betamax machine, things that failed. If you think about it, we live in a culture that talks about the value of failure and how important it is. But we don't celebrate it in museums.

In the museums we only celebrate successes. So why not a museum of crap? Or if you want to make it more PG13, “the museum of mistakes”. I think it’s actually a good idea to show people things that didn’t work out because it’s a cliché but it’s true. We’ve learned from those mistakes or rather successful creative people learned from their mistakes, there’s no guarantee that a failure leads to success but it’s always, always part of the equation.

[0:11:21.9] JG: Yeah, as you say in the book, even if that is a bad idea, that’s one more piece of crap that could go into the museum of crap.

[0:11:29.4] EW: Yeah, that’s what Thomas Edison said essentially. He had tried like a thousand ways to come up with an electric car. This is a good century or more ago. They all failed and his colleague said, “You failed a thousand times.” He says, “No, now I know there are a thousand ways not to create the electric car. I just have to find the right one. So in that sense, obviously failure is helpful.

[0:11:53.7] JG: Yeah, absolutely. So what was something surprising that you learned from your journey?

[0:12:00.3] EW: Oh, I don’t know where to begin, there was so much. The first thing was simply that all this genius clusters were almost always cities. The only exception I can think of is Silicon Valley, which began in essentially farm lands from capital America. Otherwise, all these places were pretty densely populated cities. It might have been small, like Edinburgh, Scotland had a population of only 45,000 during the golden age but they were dense, they were vibrant. If it takes a village to raise a child, as the African proverb goes, it takes a city to raise a genius.

I sort of knew that but the extent to which that is true surprised me. I was surprised by how unlikely these places were and what I mean any that is, we often associate a golden age with the kind of paradise. Golden age, everyone’s lounging, eating grapes and reciting poetry. It really wasn’t that way and isn’t that way. These were hard places, these were places that challenged me. Athens, the land was essentially barren, it was really hard to grow anything and it was the city state, which there were hundreds at the time, was not the wealthiest or the strongest.

If you were placing best back then and which one of this several hundred Greek city states goes on to be the premier place you would not bet on Athens. To get back to Florence, a couple of decades really, before the blossoming of the renaissance, changing history for the better. Florence was Decimated by the black death, the bubonic plague, a third of the population was wiped out. It was terrible.

On a human scale, it was awful but it did shake things up, it did shake up the social order and that kind of turmoil is always necessary for these places. The golden age does not mean paradise. In fact, I would argue that paradise is probably the worst place for creativity because you have nothing to push against. Everything's there for you.

[0:14:03.6] JG: Right, yeah. I think, correct me if I'm wrong, you talked about that about Scotland as well, which I had sort of heard glimpses of this idea of a golden age of Scotland. Like the Scottish enlightenment and all the things that the Scottish gave to the world. But I hadn't really delved deep into. So that was a location that surprised me in your book. I mean Ancient Athens, Silicon Valley, sure, Florence, Italy, those all make sense but Scotland probably would have been one of those that I overlooked. What attracted you to that place?

[0:14:38.8] EW: Well first of all exactly what you just said, because it was a surprise to you and I'm sure to many readers as were a few other cities I explore in the book. I think that's what I wanted to do, I want to have mixes of some well known places and some kind of off the map places. The more I dug into Edinburgh, we're talking the late 18th century, the more I discovered that wow, this was a place that produced so much of what still affects our lives today.

Modern economics, and sociology, and geology and actually a lot of ideas came in of Scotland that directly influenced the birth of this country, the United States. A lot of the founding fathers visited Scotland including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson wrote effusively about Edinburgh being the greatest city in the world. Some of the founding fathers who signed the declaration of independence studied at the medical school there.

So I was pleasantly surprised to find out what an outsized role it played and it also, it seemed unlikely too. I guess I love a good mystery and it was a mystery. Why would this city, which in

mid-18th century was illiterate and poor and quarrelsome and alcoholic, as one historian described it. Why would it go on to be the most intellectual place in all of Europe and all of the world? So it presented a surprise and a good mystery for me to tell.

[0:16:08.7] JG: And what, at least for Scotland, what were the elements that caused it to be such a creative place for that moment in history?

[0:16:17.7] EW: I mean I should preface my accounts by saying it remained something of a mystery even to people who have studying this all their life. But that's okay, it's sort of like the Loch Ness monster. It had that smallness, that density, it had people living cheek by jowl, who were not exactly like one another. You would have very rich people and very poor people living in the same building.

Now the rich people live in a higher up floor to get away from the stench of the streets, but they were often in the same building, in the same neighborhood. So you'd had these interactions, not among like minded people. Adam Smith, founder of modern economics and his famous book *The Wealth of Nations*, he spent time in the library sure. But he spent at least as much time talking to merchants of Edinburgh and Glasgow and mixing with them.

They had these clubs. They were not really exclusive, they were just kind of weird. There was the 717 Club where they would only meet at 7:17 PM for some reason. And the Six Foot Club where you had to be six feet tall, which was no mean feat back then when people were shorter. My favorite was the Oyster Club, which was founded by Adam Smith, as I mentioned and his good friend David Hume, the great philosopher.

They would get together and they would eat oysters because it was considered actually food of the people back then, not elite food and drink red wine, they drank more than that, scotch actually back then and then they would get hammered and they would talk and there was a great premium blade placed on conversation that I think was considerably more free wheeling than the kind of circumscribed conversations we have today.

I discovered this great Scottish tradition called “flyting”. Probably have not heard of it. I certainly haven’t. A Scottish historian designed it for me as the ritual humiliation of your opponent through verbal violence.

[0:18:12.9] JG: Fun stuff.

[0:18:14.7] EW: Yeah, I said, “It sounds brutal Tom.” And he said, “Oh, it is,” with a twinkler in his eye. The key is that you could ritually humiliate your opponent through verbal violence and he would do the same to you, but afterwards you’d both head down to the pub for a pint or five. You know? Because there were no hard feelings. That kind of free discourse an inter disciplinary discourses, is hugely important. All these places, there are no barriers between discipline.

Very different from today where we live in the age of specializations. People learning more and more about less and less. All these fields were very young in Scotland, sociology and Economics, so there were not this barriers and I think all creativity is about making connections and in Edinburgh it was easy to make connections.

[0:19:05.2] JG: Were there general commonalities that you saw amongst all these places? Could you answer the question, “What makes a place creative?”

[0:19:16.1] EW: Well if I had the absolute formula, I probably wouldn’t be talking to you now. I’d be on my yacht in the Mediterranean sipping on a nice drink. So I want to say that I don’t think there’s a recipe.

[0:19:27.0] JG: Yeah, okay.

[0:19:27.9] EW: You can just follow and then you have a creative place because it’s like my publisher, I asked him about what makes the bestseller? He said, “Well if we knew, we would make everyone a best seller.” So it’s not that simple but it’s not random either. So here I think are three of the common elements, I call them the three D’s: Diversity, discernment and disorder. Diversity, I don’t mean ethnic diversity, certainly not that only but intellectual diversity, an openness to experience. That’s the one trade that psychologists say all creative people

have. I think, by extension, all creative places. They are open to the other and that means being open intellectually to other ideas.

It often means being open to the idea of foreigners living amongst you. Athens and Silicon Valley today and Vienna of 1900 had very open immigration policies. Even though, going back even to Pericles in ancient Athens 450 BC, in one of his speeches, he basically acknowledged this is dangerous, there might be enemies amongst these people we allow in but it makes us more vibrant, he actually said that.

[0:20:41.4] JG: Wow.

[0:20:42.2] EW: It's not a big leap from there to our current debate on immigration. So there's that openness and that diversity of ideas, number one. Number two, discernment which gets less attention than openness. That is essentially separating good ideas from bad ideas. Well you can't just say, "Well we're open, equally open to everything." Las Vegas is a pretty open and tolerant place, but a lot of geniuses come out of there, you know?

So you need to be discerning and just one brief anecdote is Jonas Salk, who was a two time Nobel Prize winner was asked by a young student, "Dr. Salk, how do you come up with so many good ideas?" He said, "It's easy, I come up with lots of ideas and I throw away the bad ones." I think all of these places like Silicon Valley are good at separating ideas with potential from ideas that are duds.

The third element actually is disorder. This is the kind of churning and turmoil that I talked about that often receives at golden age, and I think needs to infuse a creative place. You can't just be like Switzerland and be functional and stayed. You need to have some churning of political life, some churning of world of ideas, studies show this is true on a personal level too. People who are seated in perfectly clean, pristine office settings come up with fewer creative ideas than those who are in slightly messier ones.

So I think those three D's, diversity, discernment and disorder are sort of the starting points that you need those and then you have other things going on. You have walkability and people

walking, there is very clear connection to walking and creative thinking, you have the social elements, have a degree of trust and think among people.

Prisons are very dense, just like cities but they're not particularly creative. There has to be actually, the word I use is "intimacy". I think these places are intimate, they might not be intimate in the way boxers are intimate with each other sometimes. There is an intimacy.

[0:22:49.1] JG: So as a creative person, as an author, when you were going through this journey and learning these lessons, did you take away practical applications for your own life? I mean I remember reading in the Scotland chapter, you said, "Well maybe I'm not disqualified from being a genius if this is what it takes."

[0:23:10.7] EW: Relishing and contradictions I think was my point there.

[0:23:12.9] JG: Oh that's right.

[0:23:14.6] EW: I do relish and contradict and the Scotts do too. They can hold two ideas in their heads simultaneously and not have their head exposed. But yes, go ahead.

[0:23:23.9] JG: So were there any takeaway's for you where there are — are there practices or practical things that you are going to do to sort of create a greater surge of creativity in your own life?

[0:23:36.6] EW: Yeah, I mean, in my own life, it's probably too late for me to be a genius you know? That ship has already sailed. Whatever genius, however you define the term. It's not too late for my 11 year old daughter who is downstairs playing Minecraft as we speak. It's a snow day here. So if you think about it, we don't — we have a certain amount of control over the city we live in, but we have more control as we get more local.

So, and the most local is the family, right? So I can create a little disorder in the household. My wife doesn't always like that. She's quite the neat freak type. But I'm not opposed to a little disorder and if her room's a little messy, well, that's okay. If she's stuck on a homework problem

and says she wants to take a break and go for a walk or do the equivalent of walking, which is probably playing Wii or something, then that's okay too.

So I think we, in our home life, can create environments that are more replicate this creative places, and we can get involved. I'll be honest, I've never been — I've always been as a writer more comfortable observing than doing but we just in my local town here in Maryland, Silver Springs, Maryland, we just built — they built a brand new amazing library space. But no one was having events there. They had no author talks or anything. so I decided to get involved and create that venue that creative space for authors to come together and to hold a talk to interested readers. So that's the small example of something that I probably wouldn't have done before I wrote this book.

[0:25:20.2] JG: Yeah, very cool. What about the person who reads this book and then go, "Well, it's not — I'm not in ancient Athens or I can't live in Silicon Valley and I can't go to these great places where amazing things are happening," which is something I hear a lot about from creative friends, "Well I can't move to New York City so I can't be an author, I can't move to Nashville," which is where I live. "So therefore I can't be a musician." And on and on, and on.

I love what you said about the family side of things. How do you respond to that objection? Obviously there are — what I love about your book is acknowledging that there are special places and special moments in times that a genius cluster, a creative cluster that we sometimes read about. What about those people who say, "Well I can't be creative because I can't go there or I don't live there or I'm not in the special moment in history."

[0:26:15.0] EW: I mean is it absolutely necessary to be living in this places? I don't think so, and I think we're able to create perhaps smaller genius clusters today partly because of technology. You never know where the next place might be. As I said, there are often small and often unexpected. So while you're busy bemoaning that you don't live in Ancient Athens you might be standing in a place that is the next ancient Athens. You know?

You could be Leonardo sitting there saying, "Oh god, I wish I lived in Athens or in Florence," and missing that boat, that's one danger. What I hope people get out of it though is not necessarily that they pick up and move to Silicon Valley, that could be a mistake, it might work for you but it

might be a mistake. But just change the way you look at creative process, to not look at it as something you do in isolation but something that takes place in a culture, in an environment and that is really about a relationship between you and the world.

Because this myth of this sort of absent minded loner genius is a little bit dangerous. I mean it can be helpful that it might motivate you against all odds to do it on your own but the idea that's a genius, whether it's Einstein or whoever, is sort of disconnected from their world is actually completely wrong.

If anything, they're more engaged with their surroundings than other people. They might do so selectively, so Einstein didn't care what his hair looked like. But he very much observed his surroundings and get his ideas from observing train stations, and passing trains, or whatever it is. The idea that you just lock yourself in a quiet room and sit there until creative ideas come to you is completely wrong. You should get out, interact with the world.

[0:28:07.1] JG: Yeah. Didn't Einstein have like a peer group when he worked in the patent office where they bounced ideas off of each other?

[0:28:13.1] EW: He did, he was also bored in the patent office in Switzerland. But he had a group of people. And [inaudible] he did too, he had the Wednesday Circle. The young, likeminded psycho analyst, a brand new field at that time. When you're coming up with a new idea, you need camaraderie. Freud called them fellow conquistadors, I guess he saw himself as really out there on a limb and he almost needed like some validation that he wasn't completely crazy.

So that's why you find people who are out on the edge of their discipline or embarking on brand new disciplines. They need that Wednesday Circle or a little bit of a society in the case of Einstein that they can have some kindred souls. That's hugely important.

[0:28:57.0] JG: One of the things that I thought was interesting about your book is sort of a "yeah, but". I remember you talking about the concept of the creative class and who was that? Richard Florida. It seemed to me that you had a deeper more nuanced argument, "How do we actually create this places and what is the nuance that goes in to creating a creative place?"

One of the things that I thought was interesting, I think it was a question that you raised which is if you're living in Florence or Scotland or China or Greece or wherever, why wasn't everybody creative? What did Leonardo Da Vinci do that was different from what other people did? So I like the idea that you could actually be living in one of these places because they're unlikely, because they weren't huge bustling places because it wasn't just about density, it was also about intimacy.

There are these factors and you might be ignoring it. I'm wondering, was there a difference between the people who recognized the unique moment in time or the advantages of the places in which they lived and took advantage of them like a Freud or an Einstein or a Michael Angelo or whatever, and then the people who didn't?

[0:28:57.0] EW: That's a very good question. That's a really good question. You're right, obviously not everyone and not even most people in renaissance Florence or at Athens or the end or any of these places were geniuses. It was always the small percentage. Ultimately, it does come down to a matter of courage, personal courage. I like to use the analogy of surfing waves, you know? You can be out there in Hawaii and you can see these huge waves and most people will sit from the beach and watch the waves.

But a few people will go out and surf, now they need people to make the surf boards, right? So immediately they're not doing it on their own, someone had to manufacture the surfboard and then probably need people to spot them. Again, more people involved and some people will wipe out in the waves and some people will quit after one or two wipeouts. But a few people continue and surf until they ride the big one. I think that is who the geniuses are. So ultimately it does come down to risk taking and taking a risk and taking a big risk at a time when such a risk has at least a chance to paying off.

I should also add that these geniuses, they were not perfect fits to their time. It's not like they were completely just happy to be living in Florence or Athens. There was always a kind of friction place, Socrates loved Athens, he really just adored that city to death literally. They put him to death. Freud, was an immigrant to Vienna, came there when he was four years old with his family. And as an outsider, an immigrant and as a Jew, who never fully fit in. But he fit in

enough, right? That his ideas, he couldn't go into, as a Jew he couldn't go into government or the military, but he can go into medicine, he channeled his creative energies into that and it was open enough at the time, talking roughly 1900 that his ideas resonated.

So the genius always is sort of occupying that space I think between insider and outsider. But why Leonardo and not the guy down the road? Hard to say, it's a lot of dates. I think the genius often is someone, has something to prove, has suffered some trauma at a young age off of a death of a parent, just loss and his father at a young age or they come from a broken home in a illegitimate family as Leonardo did. He was born out of wedlock. That stigmatized him but also motivated him.

[0:32:35.4] JG: Do you have any hypothesis about the next place of genius, did anything pop in your mind because when I was reading this, I thought, "Well this was so interesting." Because you think about Florence, obviously that was one that stuck with me. You think about the big creative hubs, like a Paris or New York City or whatever, and they are this huge cities today.

What was an interesting take away for me and you talk about this earlier was, these were unlikely places, they weren't that big at the time. They weren't typically the biggest cities in those countries or areas. So are there places right now that have caught your attention that you go, "Wow, there's really interesting stuff happening there."

[0:33:16.8] EW: Yeah, Tallinn, capital of Estonia I think is interesting and worth watching. We're speaking via Skype. Skype was invented in Estonia.

[0:33:25.3] JG: Wow, I didn't know that.

[0:33:27.1] EW: There you go. Later purchased by Microsoft, but invented there and I think it's an interesting place because it has a free flow of information, very open flow of inspiration. Very open in this country, very wired as well. Geographically, interesting location sort of between east and west. And a strong culture, one that was though it was part of the Soviet Union, it was never really lucified in today's very much barking, really acquainting itself with the Estonian culture.

And has that chip on their shoulder, if you know. That was true in Silicon Valley too. People were like, “We’re out here in California which you know, in 1920’s, 30’s, 40’s made a big difference, you know? You were not one of the establishment. You were a long ways from the center of power. They were determined to prove that they were every bit as good as those east coast snobs and Estonians are determined to prove that they’re as good as Russians to the east or Europeans to the west.

So that’s one place I think is worth watching but it’s sort of like trying to predict the weather two weeks from now. It’s very hard to do and it’s not because the weather is random. It’s because it’s complex and there’s — one variable could have a huge output later on, it’s called the butterfly effect. It could be there, it won’t be North Korea I will say that. It’s not because they don’t work hard or don’t have genius. It’s just not an open system.

[0:34:59.5] JG: Wow. Fascinating stuff, the book is *The Geography of Genius*, I loved it. Thanks so much for spending some time with me Eric.

[0:35:05.7] EW: Thanks Jeff, you’ve been creative after this.

[0:34:09.1] JG: I am

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:35:18.2] AT: So based on Jeff’s conversation with Eric today, is your creativity fostered or hindered because of where you live? More importantly, what are you going to do based on your answer to that question? To leave your thoughts on this episode or to easily share it with someone else. Go to Goinswriter.com/112. I’m Andy Traub and on behalf of Jeff Goins, thanks for spending some time with us today. Now go build your portfolio.

[0:35:55.1] EW: The idea that you just lock yourself in a quiet room and sit there until creative ideas come to you is completely wrong. You should get out and interact with the world.

[END]